

Public Comment Summary
Petrified Forest National Park GMP Newsletter 1
February 2001
(updated March 7, 2001)

Executive Summary

The first newsletter asked for the public's input on the park purpose and significance statements and on issues that the planning team believes the general management plan revision should address. The team received twenty comments in response to the first newsletter.

Most respondents expressed agreement with the park purpose and significance statements, but there were a few suggestions for revising the statements.

No new general management plan (GMP) issues were identified. Comments on the draft GMP issue statements are summarized below:

Issue #1--Petrified Wood Theft. Respondents disagreed on whether petrified wood from outside the park should continue to be sold in park gift shops. Some thought selling the wood gives a mixed message; others thought discontinuing wood sales in the park could worsen the wood theft problem. Some said more signs indicating that wood sold in park gift shops comes from outside the park would be helpful.

Issue #2--Park Boundary Expansion. Preservation of petroglyphs and other archeological resources was specifically mentioned by a few respondents as a reason for boundary expansion.

Issue #3--Painted Desert Inn. People generally agreed that the Inn should be stabilized and used for park-related purposes such as a museum.

Issue #4--Housing. Opinions on housing for park staff differed. Some people said not all park structures need to be preserved. Others said that good housing is necessary to keep good employees, and that staff should be allowed to live in the park if they wish. Another said housing should be provided only for personnel necessary for park security. One respondent said that all structures and their significance should be carefully considered before any plans are made.

Issue #5--Historic Structures and Landscapes. There were few comments on this topic. One person suggested that prehistoric landscapes (and related archeological sites) should be interpreted.

Issue #6--Painted Desert Visitor Center/Headquarters Complex. Some said it would be more cost effective to build new structures, so deteriorating structures should be removed. Others agreed that improvements to the buildings are needed. Some people suggested new uses for the existing structures, and some said that the architectural significance of the complex should be highlighted.

Issue #7--Museum Collection. Some respondents suggested that the museum collection should be housed and managed by a professional institution (e.g. a museum) rather than by the park.

Issue #8--Work Space and Housing for Researchers. Commenters generally agreed that the park has been a good place to do research in the past and they hope that the park will continue to support scientific research in the future. Some mentioned the importance of research to visitor understanding and appreciation of park resources.

Issue #9--Concessions. Not much was said on this topic. One letter expressed the opinion that the current services (gift shop, dining facilities, and gasoline sales) are necessary and appropriate.

Issue #10--Activities on Surrounding Lands. Future development on adjacent lands that could affect park resources or viewsheds was of particular concern. Letters generally supported acquiring adjacent properties to protect park resources.

Issue #11--Opportunities for People with Disabilities. No comments were received.

Issue #12--Roads. One person said roads along wilderness boundaries should be opened for a few years to allow full evaluation of wilderness resources by researchers.

Issue #13--Management Zones and Issue #14--Puerco Valley/ Giant Logs/ Long Logs. No substantive comments were received on these topics.

Wilderness Planning--

On the question of what is special about the Petrified Forest wilderness character and experience, the following were mentioned:

- ◆ Solitude
- ◆ Wonderful scenery
- ◆ Unusual landforms
- ◆ Silence
- ◆ The feeling that the lands are untouched by humans
- ◆ The sense of geologic, paleontologic, and archeologic history
- ◆ Opportunities to view wildlife

On the question of wilderness management issues and concerns, the following viewpoints were expressed:

- ◆ Views from the wilderness should be protected
- ◆ Users should help stop theft and vandalism and offenders should be prosecuted
- ◆ Education for users about how to have a minimum impact on resources (including fossil and archeological resources) is critical.

Suggestions for appropriate numbers of people or group size in wilderness were given, as were ideas about inappropriate activities or limits on appropriate activities in wilderness. Many comments implied that a National Park Service management presence is necessary to protect resources and wilderness values. One person suggested that new wilderness management actions should be tested via pilot programs before long-term management decisions are made. Another made the point that paleontological excavations have a minimal impact and are rarely apparent to wilderness users.

Other comments--

In addition to comments on the draft purpose, significance, and planning issues people provided other information. Some comments were specific solutions to issues or problems. These comments will be looked at again in the next stage of planning, when management options for the park are developed. Other people provided detailed recommendations related to park operations or other detailed suggestions for how to accomplish projects in the park. These ideas will be passed on to the park staff for consideration and action. Although not directly related to identifying general management plan revision issues, this information will be helpful in planning and managing the park.

Detailed Summary of Public Comments

Number of Responses:

Twenty responses total (14 comment forms, 4 letters, 1 web form, and 1 e-mail that included a comment form). Letters included responses from the Hopi Tribe, Amfac (Fred Harvey), and the Arizona Department of Transportation.

Purpose and Significance Statements:

Do you agree with the purpose and significance statements?

Eleven "yes" responses, zero "no" responses, and eight people did not answer this question

Note: The numbers in parentheses following the comments below are comment letter identification numbers. They indicate which letter(s) contained the comment.

Suggested Revisions or Additions to Purpose Statements:

First statement:

--change "paleontological sites and specimens" to "paleontological resources" (11)
--change its "associated ecosystems, cultural and historical resources," to "its associated biological, cultural and historic resources" (11)

Second statement:

--add "Further study of the park's many archeological sites would be of great value to the research of Southwest prehistory." (12)

Third statement:

--add to the end of the statement "into the resources of the park" (11)

Fourth statement:

--amend to say: "stewardship of resources, park values, and cultural history of the park..."

Add a new statement:

--"Promote understanding and preserve surviving artifacts of the Neutra and Alexander design of park facilities; the only example of such work in the Western States." (13)

Suggested Revisions or Additions to Significance Statements:

--Add archeological significance. The park is in the top ten for archeological significance. Don't neglect educational potential of pueblos, pit house villages, rock art. (6)

--Include a statement about cultural resources. The park has a wide range of archeological sites from the Paleo-Indian period, through the Archaic, to the Formative, and Proto-historic periods. The park offers a great opportunity to explore the transition from hunter-gatherers to semi-sedentary horticulturalists and demographic shifts in the Late Prehistoric Period (Pueblo IV). (10)

--Expand the significance statement: "Similarly the park has the opportunity to display unique architecture; the only example of its kind in the entire national system." (11)

--Suggested rewrite: "Petrified Forest National Park contains globally significant deposits of unusually well preserved plant and animal fossils of Late Triassic age. These deposits are of particular interest because they include the remains of many elements of a 225 million year old

non-marine ecosystem. The abundant paleontological resources found in the park provide outstanding opportunities to study relationships and changes in past organisms and their environments in order to better understand the environment of today." (11)

--Good start, but statements would be improved if they included attention to establishing/maintaining ties with the community of interested persons, especially tribes and other local communities. (1)

Draft GMP Issue Statements

Issue #1 (Wood Theft)

--This is the most important issue (major reason for creation of the park). (2)

--More signs indicating wood sold by concessionaire comes from outside park would be helpful. (4,17)

--Do not sell wood at the visitor center; it gives a mixed message to the public. Concentrate on education work with adjacent tourist facilities to increase awareness of theft problem. (5)

--Against eliminating sale of petrified wood from gift shops. Eliminating the sale of petrified wood would increase the wood theft problem. (11,12,17)

--Theft of wood is a real problem. There should be more customs-type searches of cars and their contents, with hefty fines for violations. (9)

--Hope that the concessions are keeping up with the "science-friendly" and environmentally protective trends seen elsewhere (9)

Issue #2 (Boundary Expansion)

--Expansion should be the number one priority. Include as many petroglyphs as possible. Include Canyon Butte sites on Fitzgerald Ranch. (6)

--Expand park to include Dead Wash Petroglyphs, even though it may remain inaccessible to visitors. (12)

--Annexation of new Navajo lands seems to be a minimal impact to Navajo Nation due to the limited area involved. (12)

--If the wilderness area boundaries are expanded, there could be implications for US 180. (19)

Issue #3 (Painted Desert Inn)

--Was the 1989 work at the Inn merely cosmetic? Make sure future work is "for real". (2)

--Consider using part of the Inn for a natural history museum (exhibits in visitors center are gone now). (11)

--Perfect facility for a museum of paleontological and archeological artifacts, the latter telling the story of the ancient inhabitants and their connection to present-day Native Americans. These topics are very frugally displayed in the visitor centers. (12)

--Surely the structure could be stabilized more cheaply than constructing a new building. (12)

--The Inn is a gem that should be restored and used. (9)

--The Inn's history should be emphasized with more period exhibits. Don't see the giftshop as necessary, though perhaps limited food service as there is a picnic area nearby. (20)

Issue #4 (Housing)

--Don't think decaying structures should be listed on national register. More cost-effective to start fresh and delete poor structures (2). Comment also applies to issues # 6, 7, and 8.

--Not all park housing needs to be preserved (4).

--If you don't have good housing you'll lose the best employees over time. (6)

--Historic structures should be preserved as much as possible for future use, but housing should be provided only for staff necessary for park security. Concessionaires should fend for themselves in Holbrook or in developed housing outside park. (8)

--NPS and concessions employees should be allowed to live in the park if they wish to. (11)

--Improvement of staff and research housing (plus research facilities) should be a priority. Existing residential structures in the park should be improved (12)
--Amfac (Fred Harvey) offers some of the best housing available in the national park system to its employees. All of the management housing and three of five employee units have been improved in the last two years. Current housing is adequate and there is no reason to remove manager/staff trailers. (17)
--Careful consideration of all structures and their possible significance should be undertaken before any plans are begun. (20).

Issue #5 (Historic Structures and Landscapes)

--Cultural landscapes are key to an effective interpretation plan. Expansion to include Canyon Butte and Stone Axe/ Wallace Tanks sites is essential to presentation of cultural landscapes. (6)

Issue #6 (Painted Desert VC/Headquarters Complex)

--Using historic buildings or building new ones in a historic style for storage would be a dream come true for scientists and educators (6). Comment also applies to issue #7.
--If you plan to build new offices at the north end of the park, maybe the old ones can be converted to a lodge and hotel for tired travelers. The restaurant is already there. (14)
--The visitor center buildings can use renovation. (9)
--It should be mentioned that the complex is the work of architectural firm Neutra and Alexander. Neutra is one of the greatest architects of the 20th century. Many buildings have deteriorated due to lack of maintenance as well as his exploration into new materials and methods. The building is underused. Small alterations and adaptations, in consultation with engineers and designers, should return the life and vigor to this complex. (20)

Issue #7 (Museum Collection)

--To address concerns, consider housing fossil collection at a major public museum (obvious choice is New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science in Albuquerque). (4)
--Park staff is too transitory, and it's too expensive and labor-intensive for the park to serve as the main repository of scientific specimens. This would be better handled by professional institutions, though the park should retain some sample collections for research, display, and referral. (9)
--Storage is a real problem. Could small storage units like "Tuff Sheds" be installed inconspicuously in the housing area? Temperature control shouldn't be a problem, as there are no fiber objects--most are bone or stone! (12)

Issue #8 (Work Space and Housing for Researchers)

--Using historic buildings or building new ones in a historic style for research and researcher housing would be a dream come true for scientists and educators. (6)
--The public might like to see scientists at work. (6)
--The park has been a very hospitable place to do research. (9)
--It's a good place to do research, with basic but comfortable facilities and great cooperation. (9)
--Hope the park will continue to support and welcome scientific research. It has a low environmental impact and brings great benefits of public interest and education. If all stories were told more visitors would get out of cars and learn about the place. (9)

Issue #9 (Concessions)

--The concessionaire fulfills a "necessary and appropriate" function for the use and enjoyment of the visitor and has a unique opportunity to further the message of environmental preservation. Guests expect on-site services. Shopping, dining, and filling gas tanks have become a part of the park experience. These facilities have been used many times when emergencies occur on I-40. (17)

Issue #10 (Activities on Surrounding Lands)

- This is particular point of concern. (4)
- Development of the immediate area adjacent to the park is more of a concern than propane storage and power. Support expanding park boundaries to protect park resources. (4,7)
- Acquire adjacent properties if possible. Dead Wash drainage and Old Paulsen Ranch have excellent archeological and paleontological resources. Other major assets include archeological sites like Castle Buttes (scene of prehistoric cannibalism, west side) and Stone Axe Ruin (with intact room block, east side). (10)
- The central park corridor from I-40 to Puerco Ruin is especially open to lands to the west, which could be subject to subdivision. Acquisition of these adjacent parcels would be desirable. Hope they are included in current plans for acquisition (12)

Issue #11 (Opportunities for People with Disabilities)

no comments

Issue #12 (Roads)

- Little is known about paleontological and biological resources in the Painted Desert Wilderness because it's so difficult for researchers to spend time in the area. Open the roads along the fence lines to researchers for a few years so the resources of this area can be fully evaluated. (11) Also applies to issue #13.

Issue #13 (Management Zones)

no additional comments (see issue #12 comment).

Issue #14 (Puerco Valley/ Giant Logs/ Long Logs)

no comments

What is special about the Petrified Forest wilderness character and experience?

- It is very difficult to learn about access opportunities and constraints. Please consider providing more and clearer information about when, where, and how to go. (1)
- Your staff experts should identify the character of the areas. The Painted Desert area is certainly not only beautiful to the eye but a good exhibit of the geological history of the area (2)
- Our trip this fall left me with a feeling of awe and wonder--to gaze out at history--an experience that will last. (3)
- The wilderness is spectacular because it is the best place to experience the Chinle badlands. The land is incredibly fossiliferous and so vividly Triassic one can picture oneself wading through Chinle streams under giant forests. (4)
- Beautiful and educational landscape: paleontology, archeology, and geology in context, relatively undisturbed. This integrity will be spoiled if surrounding land can not be preserved as is. (6)
- It is relatively untouched and undeveloped. (7,8,12)
- Allows visitors an opportunity to step back into time and see nature at work. (8,15)
- Paleontology of vertebrates, invertebrates, and plants; Native American archeology; wildlife, opportunities for exploration, great scenery. (9)
- There's a great Triassic story for the public. (9)
- The Chinle formation and the exposures in the Painted Desert are a unique aesthetic experience, as are the petrified logs in the area south of the Puerco River. (10)
- Away from roads and trails wildlife viewing can be good at certain times of day. (10)
- The management principles, plus the silence and visual beauty. (12)
- Allows understanding of important times in human history. (15)

What concerns do you have about management of the Petrified Forest wilderness lands?

- All unimpaired views from park wilderness must be protected. (1)

- All wilderness/park users need to be enlisted in helping to prevent theft/vandalism and all perpetrators prosecuted. (1)
- Preserve, protect, allow visitation by lay as well as professionals. (2)
- Very concerned about subdivision and development on nearby private and tribal lands. Park expansion and other activities that protect the Painted Desert in particular and the Petrified Forest in general are critical to the park's purpose. (4)
- Education on minimum impact for backcountry use. (5)
- Hikers need easy to grasp information on how to avoid damaging the wilderness: the paleontological materials and archeology (don't remove objects from context, don't do rubbings or chalk rock art). Rangers on horseback would be useful and attractive. (6)
- Keep groups small (ten or fewer). (6)
- Have concerns about protecting cultural resources in the grasslands east of Crystal Forest and along Puerco Ridge. Site density is very high in those areas. I question how scenic that area is for a wilderness experience--maybe it would be better off with restricted access. (10)
- Little is known about paleontological and biological resources in Painted Desert Wilderness because it's so difficult for researchers to spend time in the area. Open the roads along the fence lines to researchers for a few years so that resources can be fully evaluated. (11)
- Recreational uses. Limit to recreational hiking only--no horses except staff patrol horses. (12)
- Camping should be limited to 2-3 hikers, research teams of 8-10 people, day use only.
- Dogs should be kept on leash. (12)
- Tours should be well-supervised and keep to trails. (12)
- Without proper management the land will be abused and its impact on visitors will be destroyed. It is a true treasure that needs effective management. (15)
- If the wilderness area boundaries are expanded, there could be implications for US 180. (19)

What other comments do you have regarding the wilderness issues (questions) identified by park staff?

- Please continue to work closely with interested/affected tribes (WMAT is not interested). (1)
- Interpretive or introspective hikes, camping in primitive facilities, and research are the types of activity wilderness areas can support. Fifteen to twenty persons with two or more qualified interpreters are an absolute maximum. (4)
- Most "damage" caused by paleontological excavation is minimal and easily reclaimed. It often takes a trained eye to detect even unclaimed excavations after a year or two. (4)
- It is so sad that the backcountry is basically closed due to theft. But keep it closed and allow hikes only with leaders (NPS or volunteer staff). (5)
- Acquire the Fitzgerald Ranch and other adjacent parcels while ranchers are still protecting their land from damage and are willing to sell. (6)
- Might want to test implementation of wilderness plan (size of groups, areas they are admitted to, etc.) with pilot programs and then evaluate the implications before any major policy decisions. (10)

Other Comments:

- Don't postpone action on all GMP issues until March 2003. Some fixes are needed now! (2)
- Wonder whether the park is highlighting living biota sufficiently. (9)
- The Hopi letter included an Invitation to park and regional staff to attend the March 2001 Hopi administrative meetings and make a presentation on the two planning initiatives.
- (Web comment): I'd like to review and comment, but when I download the .pdf file I get 6 blank pages. They appear to be 11x17, which is hard to print for study. (18)
- Please print future comment forms on lighter weight paper stock--this card stock is hard on my typewriter. (2)
- Am concerned about what our new president and his cabinet have planned for our national parks. (3)

Implementation Plan Comments (non-GMP)

--suggestions for improving reproduction of antelope herd: build a bridge over the railroad tracks, transport bucks or pregnant does between herds. (14)